SPECIAL REPORT

10 YEARS REVIEW OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA OF THE AU PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 is a milestone for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. In addition to the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325, this year also marks the 10th anniversary of the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) decision making women, peace and security a standing thematic agenda of the PSC. [1] Moreover, the year also marks the 10th anniversary of the Decade for African Women (2010-2020), which was launched on 15 October 2010 in Nairobi and subsequently endorsed by the 16th Ordinary Session of the Union in 2011.

The ten-year anniversary of the agenda presents an opportunity for examining the status of the theme in the work of the PSC, how the WPS agenda is evolving and whether and how it is informing/shaping the work of the AU. This research report also seeks to examine the extent to which the WPS agenda is consolidated and explore the pathways for its trajectory in the coming years.

Against the background of the foregoing, this special research report discusses the genesis and evolution of the WPS agenda within the AU and how it relates to UNSC resolution 1325. The report is structured in four sections. The first part provides a background on the broader AU policy and legal frameworks on gender and women's rights.

This part shows that the WPS agenda is a manifestation of pre-existing legal and policy commitments of the AU and as such has firm normative foundations within the AU. The second part considers the treatment by the PSC of the women, peace and security agenda and how the PSC and the AU pursued the WPS agenda since the decision of the PSC in 2010 to make it a standing thematic agenda. The third part will look at the level of implementation of the WPS agenda by the PSC and within the AU in general. Finally, in part four, the paper will then conclude by providing policy recommendations to ensure that commitments are translated into practice and on the role of the AU as an agenda setter and in providing guidance to member states.

AU POLICY AND NORMATIVE ARCHITECTURE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The AU and African member states have a played leading role in agenda and norm setting on gender equality and women's empowerment. A number of legal and policy instruments have laid the foundation for a robust AU engagement on the WPS agenda. The WPS is rooted in landmark AU human rights instruments, policy frameworks, strategies and decision-making mechanisms.

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[1] *223rd PSC session Press statement, 30 March 2010*

There is appreciation of the WPS agenda from a plethora of AU foundational instruments. The AU Constitutive Act, the founding treaty of the AU, adopted in 2000 is anchored in a common vision that is inclusive of women in building a united and strong Africa as indicated in its preface. The Constitutive Act further recognizes the promotion of gender equality as one of its core principles (Article 4).

During the establishment of the AU, at its inaugural session, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2002 made a decision that the election of AU Commissioners should be based on gender parity principle. The decision was further implemented during the Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly in Maputo in 2003 through the election of five female and five male Commissioners.

Similarly, the Protocol relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council, adopted in 2002, recognizes the disproportionate impact of conflicts on women. The Protocol further highlights the role of non-governmental organizations, community-based and other civil society organizations, particularly women's organizations, to participate actively in the efforts aimed at promoting peace, security and stability in Africa.

In 2003, a landmark human rights instrument was adopted: the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)[2]. The Protocol has explicitly addressed women's right to peace and the need for women's protection in armed conflicts. Hence, the human right framework addresses women's

rights beyond times of peace by also stipulating provisions for the protection of the rights of women during armed conflicts. The protocol provides key steps for the fulfillment of the right to peace including 'women's right to peaceful existence and their right to participate in the promotion and maintenance of peace'[3]. It further puts responsibility on states to invest on social development particularly targeting the promotion of women's rights.

Even before the adoption of the Maputo Protocol, African human rights mechanisms have created space for the protection and promotion of women's right. In 1998, the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) established the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa during its 23rd ordinary session. The special mechanism was set up in order to address the specific human rights issues of concern for women.

A year after the adoption of the Maputo protocol, the third Ordinary session of the AU Assembly adopted the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) in 2004. Although the instrument is not binding, member states committed to report annually on the progress made in terms of gender mainstreaming and to advance the provisions in the declaration at the national as well as regional levels.

The declaration speaks broadly on various thematic areas in relation to women's right. One of the eight priority areas identified in the declaration include a commitment by member states to "Ensure the full and effective participation and representation of women in peace process including the prevention, resolution, management of conflicts and post-

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[2] *The Protocol has entered into force in 2005; to date it has been signed by 49 member states and ratified by 42.*

[3] *Article 10, Maputo Protocol*

conflict reconstruction in Africa as stipulated in UN Resolution 1325 (2000)" and it further recommends the appointment of women as Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the AU. The Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) receives report from member states on the implementation of the declaration.

The Solemn Declaration on African Common Defense Policy of 2004 provides details on gender and the WPS agenda. The Policy is guided by the principles recognized under the AU Constitutive Act including the promotion of gender equality. The WPS agenda has accordingly received attention in the policy through the inclusion of a dedicated objective. The Policy, among other objectives, aims at providing 'a framework for the effective participation of women in conflict prevention, management and resolution activities'. Various continental instruments on the rights of women and global ones are recognized as foundation and building blocks for the development of the policy.

The other mechanism in which the AU has promoted gender equality is through its strategy adopted in 2009. The strategy provides guidelines on the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming and the promotion of women's rights in Africa. It tasks AU institutions, organs, RECs to incorporate gender perspectives into all policies, programs and activities.

The twelfth ordinary session of the AU Assembly [4] declared 2010-2020 as the Women Decade. One of the ten focus areas of the declaration is peace and security and violence against women. It makes particular reference

to the work with (of) the African Union Peace and Security Department (PSD), the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the Panel of the Wise in relation to United Nations Security Council Resolutions: 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889, with particular focus on Violence Against Women (VAW), peace building and reconstruction.[5]

The 10 years AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018-2028) launched in February 2019 is another landmark instrument. The second pillar of the strategy is dedicated to the dignity, security and resilience of women and aims at reducing all forms of violence against women and girls as well as increase women's participation in peace processes. To this end the strategy recognizes the need to create a 'continental coalition to strengthen outcomes of existing AU and global commitments to ending and penalizing violence against women and girls; promoting women's participation in peace processes; developing guidelines on reparations, and lobbying for their integration into transitional justice and peace processes' [6]. In the 2019 AU Transitional Justice Policy, [7] the issue of gender and women rights is treated not only as a cross cutting issue but it has also been mainstreamed in the Policy.

From the review of the normative and policy documents, it is possible to identify four ways by which the question of gender and women is approached. Beyond recognition of women for legal and policy focus, the instruments first seek to advance the inclusion of women in peace processes. Second, they also recognize the disproportionate impact of conflicts and violence on women and seek to address gender based and sexual violence that in particular

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[4] *Assembly/AU/Dec.229(XII)*

[5] *https://au.int/en/documents-43*

[6] *AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018-2028 https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36195-docau_strategy_for_gender_equality_womens_empowerment_2018-2028_report.pdf*

[7] *https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36541-docau_tj_policy_eng_web.pdf*

target women and girls during conflicts. Third, the instruments envisage that consideration is given to gender beyond treating gender and women issues as standalone matter. Finally, the instruments also envisage measures for putting in place dedicated institutional mechanisms.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

Overview of Major PSC Decisions

The WPS agenda in the PSC dates back to 2010. The 14th Ordinary session of the Assembly of the AU held in February 2010 under the theme Peace and Security in Africa in its decision Assembly/AU/Dec.275 (XIV) requested the PSC to devote a special session to the theme of Women and Children in Armed Conflict.

Following this the PSC held its first open session dedicated to this topic on 30 March 2010. During this 223rd session of the PSC, the AUC submitted a briefing note on 'Mitigating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts'. It is worth noting that at this stage of its evolution, the agenda on WPS is treated together with other vulnerable groups, particularly children. The PSC was also briefed by a women led organization Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

At the session, the PSC addressed issues related to root causes of conflict and human security. It highlighted the need to uphold and respect human rights and implement existing regional and international norms and standards to mitigate the vulnerabilities. By the end of the session, the PSC released a press statement and made a decision to devote an annual open session, to the theme of women and children and other vulnerable groups in armed conflicts. It further urged states to ratify, domesticate and implement relevant human rights instruments.

In the past decade a number of changes took place in this particular PSC space and various landmark decisions were also made. The first change came in the form of separating the WPS agenda from children affected by armed conflicts particularly from 2014 onwards. Until then, the WPS agenda was not addressed on its own rather it was linked with theme of children affected by armed conflict (CAAC) agenda. The appointment of the Special Envoy on WPS also contributed in delinking the two agendas and in ensuring that the WPS progressively comes out as a standalone agenda.

The 21st Ordinary Executive Council Session held in Addis Ababa in June 2012 played a key role in further separating the two agendas. The Executive Council adopted a Decision EX.CL/Dec.712 (XXI) in which it requested the PSC to take into account the rights of the child in its agenda and cooperate actively with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

On the basis of this decision the PSC held a consultative meeting with the ACERWC on 18 February 2014 to identify means to institutionalize the collaboration. At the end of the meeting the PSC decided to devote an annual open session on issues of children in Africa [8]. Consequently, the PSC held its first open session devoted to children affected by armed conflicts on 8 May 2014, which further reiterated the call for regularizing the open session [9]. Since this session, the CAAC agenda has been increasingly been considered on its own in the PSC policy space.

Although there are clear overlaps between women's rights and child rights, coalescing the two has been subjected to legitimate criticism. Advocates of gender equality and feminist critiques expound how integrating the two areas runs the risk of equating 'womanhood' to 'motherhood' and limits women's responsibility solely as caregivers while women's needs and interest becomes only secondary[10]. Highlighting the distinct sources of vulnerabilities of women and children, advocates of women rights have also underlined the importance of promoting and fulfilling the distinct human rights of women, both in the private and public spheres. Indeed, the adoption of the Maputo Protocol was in part as a result of the problematic treatment of the rights of women in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights along with the protection of the family and the child under its Article 18.

Even from the perspective of AU normative instruments, it is possible to see that there are distinct legal instruments that address the issue of children (Children's charter) and that of women (Maputo Protocol). Indeed, the AU system itself dedicates two separate regimes of law for dealing with the rights of children and women. This is a result of the recognition of the distinct nature of both the interest to be protected and the issues affecting children and women addressed in the two regimes of law.

Apart from reflecting existing approaches within the AU legal order, the separation of the two agendas at the policy level was also a response and an effort to provide adequate attention to both groups without lumping the unique experiences and needs of both women and children. This distinction is particularly important in conflict settings, which are highly complex and hence the protection issues and the remedial measures have to be tailored to the needs of specific groups.

The next phase in the consolidation of the WPS agenda of the PSC is the appointment in January 2014 of a Special Envoy on WPS. The appointment was a major step in institutionalizing the WPS agenda not only at the level of the PSC but also in mainstreaming it in the workings of the AU. One of the concrete recommendations by the PSC that was made during its 223rd and 364th sessions directed to the AUC was the appointment of a Special Representative on Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children.

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[8] *PSC Press Statement 420th session, Consultation with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) 18 February 2014*

[9] *PSC Press Statement 434th session, Open session on "Children in Armed Conflicts in Africa: Briefing by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). ", 08 May 2014.*

[10] *Rachel Thomson and Lisa Baraitser, Thinking Through Childhood and Maternal Studies: A feminist encounter in Feminism and the Politics of Childhood, 2018*

In January 2014, the then AUC Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma appointed Bineta Diop as the Special Envoy on WPS. The Special Envoy was appointed to undertake a high-level advocacy to advance the agenda and raise the needs and voices of women affected by conflict. The office also aimed at working towards implementation of policies and decisions through robust monitoring mechanisms [11].

Although the PSC considered women's rights and child rights jointly and called for a special envoy that promotes the agenda of both groups the Commission opted to have a Special Envoy covering only the WPS. Under Zuma's leadership, the promotion of women's rights received significant policy attention. During Zuma's chairpersonship for two consecutive years the AU theme focused on women's rights. Arguably, it was in this context of strong commitment in advancing gender equality and women rights that a dedicated attention was given to the advancement of the WPS agenda.

This appointment also reveals the institutional relationship between the PSC and AUC as well as the agency the latter possess in interpreting and implementing decisions directed to it. It is also a demonstration that the level of implementation of decisions is determined by the extent to which there is synergy and adequate input of the AUC when taking decisions with institutional, legal and financial implications.

Another institutional mechanism in the consolidation of the WPS agenda is the Gender, Peace and Security Program of the AU Commission Department of Peace and Security.

Although it was initially recommended in the APSA 2010 Assessment study, the AUC launched the five-year (2015-2020) Gender, Peace and Security Program (GPSP) in June 2014 [12] few months after the appointment of the Special Envoy. The program aims at enhancing women's protection and participation and supporting gender mainstreaming across APSA, AU Liaison Offices and Missions as well as RECs. As AU Commissioner for Peace and Security put it on the occasion of the launch of the Continental Results Framework (CRF) on WPS in Africa, the GPSP enhances dialogue around women's effective participation in peace and security in Africa, protection in time of conflict and recognition of the women's role in post-conflict, reconstruction and development.[13] The program is currently hosted in the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division of the AUC.

Review of the 2010-2019 sessions of the PSC on WPS

In terms of agenda setting the timing of agenda is generally set in the annual indicative program of work of the PSC, for whose drafting the PSC Secretariat is responsible. The timing as reflected in the indicative annual program of work is associated with the commemoration of events. The timing of the session in March is associated with the woman's month whereas the timing of the session in October is associated with the commemoration of Resolution 1325.

Ordinarily, the specific focus of the session on WPS is determined by the monthly Chairperson of the PSC, who under the PSC Protocol and Rules of Procedure, leads on crafting the agenda of the sessions of the PSC.

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[11] *AUC, the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, at a glance, 2016, http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/01-ose-at-a-glance-bookletmodified.pdf*

[12] *https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/african-unionlaunches-five-year-gender-peace-and-security-programme-2015-2020*

[13] *https://www.info-communication.com/en/616020940-remarks-by-commissioner-for-peace-and-security-on-thevalidation-of-the-african-union-continental-results-frameworkfor-monitoring-and-reporting-on-the-implementation-of-thewomen-peace-and-security*

In relation to the WPS, the practice shows that the focus of the session is determined in consultation between the PSC Chairperson of the month, the Special Envoy and the PSC Secretariat. While there are instances in which the Special Envoy has not been involved in the sessions of the PSC on WPS, for those sessions in which it is participating the Special Envoy is involved in developing the concept note or background note that frames the issues to be addressed in the session.

Between 2010 and 2019 the PSC held about 18 sessions dedicated to the various thematic areas within WPS. In addition to the open sessions initially held in March the meetings increased in frequency over the years with the appointment of the Special Envoy on WPS. By the end of 2019 the open sessions have grown from annual events to three times a year. The institutionalization of the PSC open session was further consolidated with the appointment of the Special Envoy on WPS.

Summary Table 1 AUPSC sessions on WPS

	Date	Session	Major decisions
1	March 10, 2010	223 Situation of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts	-Increase women's representation in AU Offices, PSOs and peace processes -Appointment of a Special Representative on Violence Against Women and Children. -Strengthening implementation and reporting of Maputo Protocol -Agreed to devote an annual open session to the theme of women and children in armed conflict
2	March 28, 2011	269 Women and Children and Other Vulnerable Groups in Armed Conflicts	-Investigate cases of crimes against women and children and bringing perpetrators to justice -Appointment of Special Representative on WPS and gender experts in Au offices. -Strengthen women's participation in formal peace processes -Urgently finalize the Training of Trainers (ToTs) Manual for engendering African peace-keeping operations
3	March 26, 2013	364 Women and Children in Situations of Violent Conflict in Africa: Contribution and Role of Women	-Peacekeeping missions to increase the number of civilian positions held by women. -Implementation of AU policy and legal instruments for the protection of women and children -Welcomed the progress of the AU Gender Training of Trainers Manual for PSOs -Appointment of a Special Representative on Violence against Women and Children in the context of armed conflict -Regular training sessions for AU Headquarters and field staff to strengthen their skills in gender mainstreaming

4	December 4, 2013	407 Women, Children and Other Vulnerable Groups in Conflict Situations in Africa	-ToT on the AU Gender Training Manual for AU PSOs important tool to address gender-based-violence in conflict situations in Africa. - Appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Children -Supported the proposal to institutionalize the annual celebration of the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325
5	October 14, 2014	461 Open session on Sexual Violence in Conflict Situations in Africa	-Called for investigation and documenting all acts of sexual violence in conflict situations - Requested the Special Envoy on WPS to regularly brief Council on her activities -TCCs to AU PSOs, to develop comprehensive and robust systems to effectively address sexual violence including through trainings -Commission to submit regular reports on the implementation of PSC's decisions on women, children and sexual violence in conflict situations
6	December 16, 2014	476 Sources of Instability in Africa: Root Causes and Responses: Focusing on the issue of Women, Peace and Security	- Increase the representation of women in decision making processes - Urged the AUC, to formulate a Continental Results Framework to monitor the implementation of the various instruments on WPS in Africa. - Stressed the need to engage women in the national reconciliation process in nation-building, conflict resolution
7	March 9, 2015	491 Vulnerability of Women and Children in Conflict Situations in Africa	- AU Members States to ensure that their national laws match the provisions of UNSC Resolution 1325 -Mainstream gender into the African peace and security agenda including by increasing the number of women in peacekeeping - Stressed the need to provide funding and capacity building to women on peace and security issues - Parties to a conflict to facilitate humanitarian assistance to women and children
8	November 5, 2015	555 Anniversary of 1325	-Increase the number of women involved in PSOs and decision making - Member States to enact legislations against all forms of impunity - Stressed the need to provide funding and capacity building related to Resolution 1325 activities -Humanitarian access to assist women and children

9	May 18, 2016	600 Briefing from the AU Special Envoy on WPS, on her activities and the role played by the AU and its Member States in the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on WPS	-Encouraged the development of more national and regional WPS Action Plans -Requested the AUC to elaborate defined Mediation Terms of Reference for inclusion of gender-provisions -Member states to strengthen mechanisms and address impunity for SGBV and exploitation -Called for the implementation of the international commitment to ensure that 15 percent of peacebuilding funds go to projects that promote gender equality. - Agreed to include the status of WPS in Africa in its Report on its Activities and the State of Peace and Security in Africa
10	October 20, 2016	635 The Role of the Media in Enhancing Accountability on WPS Commitments in Africa	- Welcomed the formation of the Network of Peace Journalists on WPS - Stressed the need for media reporting to be contextsensitive, and to take into consideration existing gender and power relations - Member States to increase the representation of women in state-owned media institutions - Member States to further strengthen their legal frameworks and to guarantee the safety and security of female journalists - Urged the media to report responsibly and to amplify the voices of women and girls
11	February 16, 2017	659 The Role of Women in Protecting Lives in Challenging Security Environments in Africa	-Underscored the need for special provisions for women serving in PSCs and for the AUC to provide sufficient numbers of medical personnel -AUC to expedite the finalization of the Continental Results Framework for Monitoring Progress and the AU Zero Tolerance Policy on SEA - Office of the AU Special Envoy on WPS, to provide quarterly briefings to the PSC on the implementation of the WPS Agenda in Africa and on her solidarity missions
12	October 31, 2017	728 The Role of Women in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Africa	- Underscored the importance for all Member States to develop national action plans for the implementation of the UNSC resolution 1325 - Strengthening women's national platforms and regional networks on peace and security to allow women to meaningfully participate in shaping comprehensive counter-violent extremism strategies -Welcomed the establishment of the network of FemWise and the AU-UN joint solidarity visits -Requested AUC to expedite the finalization of CRF

13	March 13, 2018	757 The plight of women and children in conflict situations in Africa	-Member States to fight impunity and promote justice for the victims of GBV and SEA - Ensure the protection of the rights of women and children are systematically addressed throughout the planning, design and mandate implementation of PSOs - Training for personnel of AU-led PSOs -AUC to expedite the finalization of the Draft AU Policy on the Prevention and Response to SEA in AU PSOs and the Draft Conduct and Discipline Policy for AU PSOs -AUC to prepare evaluation reports on the implementation of its previous decisions on women and children in armed conflicts to be considered in the subsequent open session -Recommended an extraordinary AU Summit dedicated to the plight of women and children in armed conflicts
14	May 16, 2018	772 (Closed Session) Adoption of Continental Results Framework for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the WPS Agenda in Africa	-Adopted the CRF -Requested the AUC to provide annual reports to the Council on the implementation of the CRF on WPS Agenda in Africa
15	October 19, 2018	803 The Role of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding at Community Level	- Appealed to member states submit national reports on the implementation of UNSCR1325 and requested the Special Envoy to submit a consolidated report on all Member States for consideration by the Assembly of the Union. -Underscored that peace building efforts can no longer be disassociated from programs aimed at uplifting the livelihoods of communities -Underscored the importance of institutionalizing the Office of the Special Envoy
16	March 19, 2019	833 The Role of Women in Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: The Contribution of Women Refugees, IDPs and Returnees in Africa	- Recommended the imposition of stiff penalties against all perpetrators of gender-based violence and sexual abuses against refugees and IDPs - Underlined the need for urgent development of guidelines on mainstreaming the experiences of women and girls in refugee and IDP camps, in the AU policies and strategies, regarding conflict prevention and resolution -Underscored the urgency for enhancing participation of women in decision-making, particularly in the delivery of humanitarian assistance - Underlined the need to provide adequate and sustained financial support, and for deliberate efforts to establish Centers of Excellence to provide capacity building training particularly for women mediators and negotiators - Reiterated the importance of institutionalizing the Office of the Special Envoy within APSA

17	July 23, 2019	862 Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts in Africa	- Fostering national ownership and leadership of holistic, sustainable, as well as victim and survivorcentered responses - Addressing the fundamental root causes of conflictrelated sexual violence - Underscored the importance of regular capacity building training on prevention of conflict-related sexual violence for security sector actors - Agreed to dedicate an annual open session to conflictrelated sexual violence
18	October 17, 2019	887 The Role of Women in Social Changes and Peace Building: Time for Recognition Commemoration	- Council requested the AU Special Envoy to consult and collect all the inputs from Member States to enrich the WPS report using the CRF - Council took note of the call for support from women of Sudan, including the removal of the Republic of Sudan form the list of countries that sponsor terrorism, the demand for a 50% representation in peace processes - Called for greater synergy and cooperation on the efforts by the AU Special Envoy on WPS and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and encouraged them to regularly brief Council on their activities. - Called on Member States to submit an annual report using the AU Continental Results Framework on monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the WPS Agenda. -Requested AUC to institutionalize the office of the Special Envoy

The 17 open sessions and one closed session dedicated to WPS that were held over the past 10 years have particularly called for five major issues: enhanced accountability, ending impunity and expanding women's access to justice, increased women's representation in decision making in conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction, addressing structural gender disparities and root causes of conflict, the need to institutionalize the WPS agenda as well as the need to deploy gender advisors in various AU office and PSOs. However, it is also noticeable that the vast recommendations and decisions of the PSC are broad and very few have a specific target and defined timelines.

There were changes that the office of the Special Envoy brought in the PSC open sessions. After her appointment, the Special Envoy delivered her first briefing at the standing women in conflict situations open session in December 2014 during PSC's 476th session. However the engagement of her office in the standing open sessions became more regularized from May 2016 onwards. In May 2016 during Council's 600th session, the Special Envoy submitted the report on the State of Implementation of WPS Commitments in Africa, which currently serves as a baseline to assess progress of the WPS agenda of member states.

Her briefings and engagement with the PSC have also contributed to the agenda setting process. In sessions which the Special Envoy was the lead briefer particularly from October 2016 onwards the PSC has started to convene more specific thematic issues in relation to the broader WPS agenda including on: the role of the media in enhancing accountability on WPS commitments in Africa (635th session),

the role of women in protecting lives in challenging security environments in Africa (659th session), the role of women in preventing and countering violent extremism in Africa (728th session), the role of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding at community level (803rd session), the role of women in conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding: the contribution of women refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees in Africa (833rd session), sexual violence in armed conflicts in Africa (862nd session) and the role of women in social changes and peace building: time for recognition (887th session).

Such focused thematic issues have allowed more targeted deliberations of the PSC on the various aspects of women's experience in conflict. There were also open sessions convened in line with the AU annual theme such as the one on the contribution of women refugees, IDPs and returnees in conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding. However it can also be observed that the choice of themes that varies over the different sessions does not necessarily build on previous sessions or thematic issues of the PSC. Except certain cases such as the briefings related to the CRF the selection of themes appears to be ad- hoc.

An area that the office of the Special Envoy has strengthened is the provision of access to women led organizations and CSOs to the PSC. This was the case when the Special Envoy in close collaboration with UNHCR brought representatives of refugees at the Gambela and Kakuma camps to brief the Council in March 2019. During the October 2019 open session the Special Envoy has also mobilized and facilitated the participation of Sudanese women led organizations that actively participated in the political transition of the country.

A number of factors have contributed to this including the Special Envoy's strong CSO background and network, which has also informed her current mandate. The engagement with grassroots women led organization was further enhanced through field missions and visits of the Special Envoy in conflict affected countries.

ASSESSING IMPLEMENTATION OF PSC DECISIONS ON WPS

It is evident from the wealth of norms and policy instruments that the major challenge in realizing the aspirations of the WPS agenda is not the absence of frameworks rather it's the lack of their implementation and follow up. Over the years key protection policy tools to prevent and mitigate SGBV in the context of AU peace support operations have been adopted by the AU and specifically the PSC. The AU Gender Training Manual for AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs) was adopted by AU Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs in May 2013 and was later launched by the PSC at its 407th open session in December 2013. Similarly, the Policy on Conduct and Discipline for PSOs and the Policy for Prevention and Response to SEA for PSOs were adopted by the Council at its 813th meeting held on 29th November 2018. The adoption of such instruments is a step forward in enhancing protection.

However, translating gender related policies and instruments for the actual protection of women in conflict has been very limited. Although the PSC has regularly called for ending impunity for crimes committed against women and bringing perpetrators to justice as indicated in the summary table, there are still no mechanisms to regularly follow up particularly in the context of conflict situations.

Gender mainstreaming in the agenda and work of the PSC is another major gap. Beyond the standalone open sessions, the gender component is still missing in the regular briefings and reports on conflict situations considered by the PSC. The Special Envoy has been undertaking field missions in various conflict-affected countries however the findings and outcomes of those missions are not systematically channelled in the deliberation and decision of the PSC when considering those country/region specific conflicts.

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) 2016-2020 roadmap recognizes gender mainstreaming in peace and security as one of the crosscutting themes to feature in the various pillars. To this end a number of indicators are incorporated in the roadmap including: evidence of increasing women participation in processes leading to peace agreements; gender-sensitive peace agreements and gender-sensitive post-conflict peacebuilding programs. Yet, the approach to mainstreaming of gender across the APSA remains at best a work in progress. Despite huge progress made towards the institutional expansion of mechanisms for WPS agenda, there is no clarity as to how to transform the level of participation of women. There is also the question of the approach to gender based and sexual violence as events arising in conflict settings as opposed to events that are extension of the way women are ordinarily treated in society.

Another area, which needs follow up, is the decision made during the 757th session of the PSC to organize an extraordinary summit on the plight of women and children in armed conflicts this has not materialized. This may also be partially due to limited level of ownership of the agenda at the highest level.

Despite the various decisions and policy recommendations that have been adopted, there remain gaps for the PSC to properly assess the level of implementation of previous decisions and their actual impact in advancing protection of women and their agency in the context of peace and security.

In an effort of enhancing implementation and address the lack of systematic follow up, the PSC sought to establish reporting mechanism on the WPS agenda. At its 476th session, the PSC tasked the Special Envoy to submit annual reports on the implementation of the CRF, which has been implemented. At its 757th open session held in 2018 made a request to the 'AU Commission to prepare evaluation reports on the implementation of its previous decisions on women and children in armed conflicts to enable Council to determine further steps to address any challenges'. The PSC further agreed to dedicate the subsequent open session on women and children in violent conflict situations to consider 'the report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the status of implementation of its previous decisions on the plight of women and children in violent conflict situations'. However this report that is expected to serve as a follow up tool is yet to be produced and presented to the PSC.

Additionally, in February 2017 at its 659th session it has requested the Office of the Special Envoy to provide quarterly briefings on the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa and on solidarity missions undertaken by the office. There is little indication that these arrangements for following up implementation are acted upon by the office of the Special Envoy and duly institutionalized.

Given the amount of decisions and deliberations by the PSC there is indeed a need to coordinate the engagement of the Council on WPS, which the office of the Special Envoy can play a proactive role. However there is still a gap in tracking the work of the PSC on WPS in a coordinated manner.

In terms of implementation, a notable development was made in elaborating and adopting the Continental Results Framework (CRF). The CRF was developed as a follow up to the 476th session of the Commission. In the Press Statement issued on that session [14] the PSC 'urged the AU Commission, through the coordination of the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS to formulate a Continental Results Framework to monitor the implementation by AU Member States and other relevant stakeholders of the various instruments and other commitments on women, peace and security in Africa.'

The purpose of the CRF is to establish a continental tool to institutionalize monitoring, assess implementation, systematize reporting and enhance accountability of various commitments towards the WPS. Although there are existing indicators developed by the UN, EU and academic institutions to monitor the WPS agenda, the CRF developed indicators that cater specifically to the African context and AU policies. As noted in the framework 'the indicators reaffirm the AU's acknowledgment that there is a need to address, in equal measure political threats, socio-economic development threats, conventional security threats and emerging threats such as violent extremism as part of the WPS Agenda'.

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[14] *Peace and Security Council, Press Statement of the 476th meeting, AU PSC Doc. PSC/PR/BR.1(CDLXXVI)*

These priorities are a reflection of AU's comprehensive understanding on security, which gives primacy to human security. The need to end root causes of conflict mainly poverty and socio-economic vulnerabilities have also been reiterated in various PSC sessions as major obstacles in ending conflicts in Africa (223rd, 364th, 476th, 728th sessions).

CRF acknowledges the various mechanisms and institutions/bodies relevant to the implementation of the agenda including the Office of the Chairperson, the Peace and Security Department, the Directorate of Women, Gender and Development, the Department of Political Affairs and RECs. However, how the Special Envoy's Office envisages synergy with these bodies and other relevant mechanisms including the GPSP and human rights mechanism is not specified in the CRF.

Although AU policies and instruments informed the development of the CRF, it is also guided by the pillars of UNSC Resolution 1325. The CRF consists of 41 indicators categorized in line with the four pillars of UNSC resolution 1325: prevention; protection; participation; relief and recovery. 28 of the total indicators are designed to assess the progress of member states while the remaining 13 measure the efforts at the AUC level. In addition to the pillars recognized by the UNSC resolution it further includes an additional aspect on emerging threats [15].

There are some limitations of the CRF given that it primarily follows the pillars of the UNSC 1325. Certain concepts that are for instance articulated in article 10 of the Maputo Protocol are not reflected in the CRF including issues related to women's participation in programs of education for peace and a culture of peace.

Furthermore the progressive element and the weight given to women's protection in Article 11 of the Maputo Protocol are not fully reflected in the CRF. The Protocol clearly mandates State Parties to consider all forms of violence, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation, as war crimes, genocide and/or crimes against humanity and that their perpetrators are brought to justice before a competent criminal jurisdiction. The CRF would have been key in capturing this salient feature of the Maputo Protocol and in developing an indicator to gauge member states efforts towards this provision.

Although UNSC resolution 1325 is not a binding instrument, national action plans (NAPs) serve as key tools in implementing the commitments regarding WPS. In recognition of this, the AU during its 25th Summit in June 2015 adopted a declaration on the 'Year of Women's Empowerment and Development Toward Africa's Agenda 2063' and member states committed to develop, implement and report on NAPs and regional plans on UNSRC 1325 [16].

On 17 October 2019, the first report to the PSC prepared and presented by the Special Envoy utilizing the CRF, noted that by the end of 2018, 24 countries have adopted NAPs[17]. This is a development in contrast to three years earlier where there were 19 member states with NAPs. Similarly, the number of Regional Action Plans (RAPs) has also increased from two to six[18].

However adopting NAPs does not necessarily translate in member states delivering on their commitments. Women's participation and representation in decision-making and political processes remains low.

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[15] https://au.int/sites/default/files/docum ents/35958-doccontinental_results_framework_wps_.pdf

[16] Assembly/AU/Decl.1(XXV)

[17] Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa, Report on implementation, AUC, 2019

[18] Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda,AUC, 2016 https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/pubs/2016womenpeacesecurity-auc.pdf

As noted in the 2019 report almost half of the peace processes in Africa took place in countries that have adopted NAPs. Nevertheless, the processes in these countries lacked gender elements and women participation. Moreover, women continue to be underrepresented in cabinets particularly in ministries of defense and justice. From the total 24 countries with NAPs, during 2000 and 2019 only 20% of women held ministers of defence position while only 3 out 24 served as ministers of justice. In terms of women representation in parliament only one country, Rwanda reached gender equality and even secured more representation.

Female representation is one of the recurring recommendations that featured frequently in PSC decisions[19]. Among other things, the various sessions of the Council have urged for the increased deployment of gender experts in the AU Liaison Offices and Peace Support Operations. According to the 2019 report, from the 12 AU Liaison offices located in countries affected by conflict, only three missions have gender advisors, namely the office in the Central African Republic, Mali (MISAHEL) and Somalia (AMISOM). In the AU led peacekeeping mission, AMISOM women represent only about 3% of the forces[20]. Moreover, women remain excluded from certain leadership positions at the AUC level as well. For instance, although gender parity principle has been applied when electing Commissioners, to date women have not occupied the positions of Commissioner and Director Peace and Security. In fact there is no division of the peace and security department that is headed by women beyond acting capacities.

As observed in the 2016 report of the Special Envoy there were no female Special Representatives and among the 10 Special Envoys only the Special Envoy on WPS is a woman. With the appointment of Aya Chebbi in 2018 as the AU Youth Envoy and Michelle Ndiaye as Special Representative of the AUC Chairperson to DRC in 2020 this has brought the total number of envoys and representatives to three. This glaring disparity needs to be addressed not only to increase representation in high profile positions but to also encourage member states to do the same in their national institutions.

The composition of PSC itself demonstrates gender disparity. Out of the former and current permanent representatives in the Council only about 23% are women[21]. In 2020[22] three female ambassadors are PSC members, Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique. This is indicative of the fact that the participation of women in peace processes cannot be separated from the inclusion of women in decision-making and leadership role in all other areas of public life.

The protection of women in conflict situations is another key area of focus both for the PSC and the work of the Special Envoy. One of the characteristic features of contemporary conflicts in general, including those on the continent, is that increasingly they involve violence against civilians and notably the use of gender based and sexual violence. Sexual violence, rather than being an isolated act of reneged individual combatants, is employed as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture and a systematic attack against a civilian population.

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[19] *PSC 223rd session called for deployment of gender experts in the AU Liaison Offices and PSOs, 269th session called for the strengthened women's participation in formal peace processes, 476th session called for the increase of representation of women in decision-making processes*

[20] *Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa Report on Implementation 2019*

[21] *Cheryl Hendricks, 'Progress and Challenges in Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture' Africa Development, Volume XLII, No. 3, 2017, pp. 73-98*

[22] *In this context the period in consideration is after 1 April 2020 when the new members officially commenced their mandate*

One example that illustrates this is the 2013-2015 civil war in South Sudan captured in some detail by the report of the AU Commission of Inquiry for South Sudan of which the Special Envoy was also a member. Sexual violence was also further aggravated by existing discriminatory practices affecting women and girls including in particular harmful customary practices [23].

Highlighting the pervasiveness of sexual violence in conflict settings, the UN Secretary-General's Report on Conflict Related Sexual Violence [24] SGBV noted that SGBV is committed by non-state armed groups as well as by the very actors that are put in place to protect communities, including national security forces or police. The report particularly highlights the linkage between the rise of extremist groups and terrorism and sexual violence as observed in the Lake Chad and Sahel regions. Human trafficking and slave markets operated by terrorist networks rely on the abduction and violence committed against women.

The measures towards addressing the multifaceted protection needs of victims of SGBV in conflict and post-conflict situations are still very limited. As also observed in the 2019 Special Envoy's report provision of such protection measures in countries that have reported are limited mainly to psychosocial services. Access to justice to ensure redress and accountability remains inaccessible for many women [25]. A number of factors contribute to this including fear of stigma, retaliation by perpetrates, the breakdown of institutions and victims lack of confidence in the justice system.

Despite women being dis-proportionality affected by violence, the particular experiences of women continue to be overlooked and unattended in peace processes and political transitions. Globally between 1990 and 2018 only about 20% of peace agreements included provisions addressing women, girls or gender. The figures clearly indicate that the vast majority of agreements do not explicitly address gender equality or the rights of women [26].

This lack of attention is attributable to two factors. First, the absence of women from mediation and peace processes has resulted in the lack of gender sensitive peace agreements. Second, peace processes do not apply the gender analysis and hence fail to capture and incorporate the experiences of women in framing peace processes and peace agreements.

The PSC has repeatedly [27] called for holding perpetrators of gender-based violence and sexual abuses accountable and fight impunity. One of the key mechanisms to support and follow up the implementation of this decision is through the provision of SGBV data in conflict situations. However, the data is very limited. For instance the office of the Special Envoy when preparing the 2019 report it only received data from four countries. The scope of the report itself was limited to the 24 countries that have adopted national action plan on women, peace and security from which only nine countries submitted their data. The data of the remaining countries that have adopted national action plans was collected through desk research.

[23] Amani Africa 'Insight' on the Open Session on Sexual Violence in Armed conflicts in Africa, 22 July 2019 http://amaniafricaet.org/images/Reports/OpenSessiononSexualViolenceArmedc onflictsinAfrica.pdf

[24] https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wpcontent/uploads/2019/04/report/s-2019-280/Annual-report-2018.pdf

[25] AUC, 2019 Report Page 41

[26] UN Secretary General Report, October 2019 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Report%20of%20the%20Secretary-General%20on%20women%20and%20peace%20and%20security%20%28S-2019-800%29.pdf

[27] Press statement of PSC's 269th session (March 28, 2011),Communiqué of PSC's 461st session (14 October, 2014), Press statement of PSC's 555th session (November 5, 2015)

This however has excluded critical countries that are in conflict or crisis situations and feature regularly on the PSC agenda however are not included in the report since they do not have a national action plan on women peace and security. These countries include Somalia, Sudan and Libya.

Hence, the requirement of including countries in the continental report should not be limited to whether the country has adopted a national action plan or not. Rather it is important for the report to pay particular attention to countries in conflict situations and to focus specifically on SGBV cases in context of conflicts.

This gap has created a lack of systematic approach for monitoring, tracking, documenting, analysing and reporting on SGBV when the PSC deals with specific conflict settings or for reporting to the PSC by the Special Envoy. There is a need for Special Envoy's report to have a dedicated section that presents in systematic way information on incidents, patterns and trends of SGBV in all conflict situations including those on the agenda of the PSC.

Overall the adoption of the CRF has contributed towards increased and more structured monitoring mechanism of implementation, which is a commendable effort. However, reporting by member states to mandated bodies of the AU remains a critical challenge. The 2016 report of the Special Envoy, noted of the very low-level reporting both on the Maputo Protocol and SDGEA. Similarly, as noted in the 2019 report from the 24 members states with NAPs only 9 have reported using the CRF to submit their reports on WPS to the office of the Special Envoy.

The initiative by the Special Envoy in establishing strategic partnership with the relevant mandate holders in the UN is a key development in terms of connecting regional efforts to global ones. The Special Envoy undertook AU-UN joint solidarity visit to Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo with the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and the Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten. The Special Envoy has also undertaken similar joint missions to South Sudan, Chad and Niger.

Moreover in 2019, the Special Envoy was joined by Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC) Pramila Pattern in July and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka Executive Director of UN Women in October respectively when addressing the PSC.

Following the October PSC session, which commemorated the 19th anniversary of 1325, the Special Envoy also briefed the UNSC in the same month. The Special Envoy used the opportunity to facilitate the participation of Sudanese women activists that were at the forefront in the country's political change to address the PSC as well as the UNSC. The PSC took note of the recommendations by the women of Sudan including the demand for a 50% representation of women in peace processes and the appointment of gender advisors to support the mediation and negotiation processes in Sudan. The realization of such decision is also highly dependent on the political developments in Sudan, although the PSC can apply continuous diplomatic and political pressure.

The briefing by the Special Envoy at the UNSC was critical given that resolution 2493 (2019) also recognized the role of regional organizations and the importance of taking in consideration the region- specific context when advancing the WPS agenda. This recommendation featured strongly in the 2019 report of the Special Envoy, which identified as best practices, the process of 'localization' of UNSC resolution 1325 in the development of NAPs. It has allowed government to design policies that are nationally owned, anchored in the needs and interests of communities while utilizing the global policy framework as an overarching guiding mechanism.

The back to back briefings of the Special Envoy at the PSC and UNSC in October for the commemoration of UNSCR 1325 also played a key role in enhancing the partnership of the two institutions over a common agenda. As much as the partnership between two councils evolved and improved over the years, there are also a number of pending matters that require further negotiation [28]. Similarly, the WPS is operationalized differently in the PSC and UNSC and policy environment is also different in the two Councils. The systematic institutionalization and strengthening of ownership of the agenda within the PSC and the AU will also facilitate genuine partnership between the two Councils on the agenda.

The dynamics in the UNSC toward the advancement of the WPS agenda is characterized with a number of challenges.

The Security Council Report, 'The Women, Peace and Security Agenda at 20' [29] notes the difficulties in advancing the WPS agenda in the UNSC indicating 'the risk of rolling back the agenda' and 'an environment unconducive to a progressive development of the agenda or even for the restating of previously agreed language'. These developments are indeed a major hurdle at the global level. Perhaps, the nature of the decision-making process of the PSC which is mainly around consensus as well existing African frameworks has played a role for the adoption of progressive decisions in the PSC.

In October under South Africa's presidency, resolution 2493 (2019) was adopted [30]. Despite weaknesses that emerged in the context of the opposition by the UN of certain aspects of the resolution, the resolution retained the language on 'full implementation' and it specifically urged 'Member States to fully implement the provisions of all previous Security Council Resolutions pertaining to the Women, Peace and Security agenda and to reinforce their efforts in this regard' [31].

This is not an isolated case of African leadership on WPS agenda. UNSC resolution 1325 although a global framework, it is also a demonstration of Africa's leadership. One of the three elected African member states (A3) in the Council, Namibia has played a key role in the adoption of the resolution. UNSC resolution 1325 was adopted under Namibia's presidency of the Security Council in October 2000.

[28]*Amani Africa Special Report No5. http://www.amaniafricaet.org/ images/Reports/AUPSC_UNSCworkingrelaitonships.pdf*
[29]*https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthlyforecast/2020-04/in-hindsight-the-women-peace-andsecurity-agenda-at-20.php*

[30] *Cheryl Hendricks, 'Progress and Challenges in Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture' Africa Development, Volume XLII, No. 3, 2017, pp. 73-98*
[31] *In this context the period in consideration is after 1 April 2020 when the new members officially commenced their mandate*

Ahead of its precedency Namibia also hosted a seminar in Windhoek that resulted in the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action for Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations (2000), which was presented to the UN Secretary General [32].

Resolution 2493 (2019) tasked regional organizations with two major assignments for the commemoration of 1325: the convening of meetings in the lead up to the 20th anniversary bringing together governments, civil society organizations to review the implementation of the WPS agenda in their respective regions and secondly to report back to the UNSC annual open debate. This provides a number of opportunities to share best practices and experience from the continent. There are a number of measures and best practise, which the AU can share with the global policy players in terms of standard and norm setting.

Moreover, the Special Envoy in collaboration with the relevant mandate holders in the UN contributes to the strengthening of the PSC-UNSC partnership on the WPS agenda. On the other hand, the annual open debate in October provides and expanded space in this regard to bring together the regional and global policy makers and agendas.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE PSC'S WORK ON WPS AGENDA AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS DECISIONS

While the CRF plays a critical tool in terms of monitoring implementation of the WPS agenda at member states as well as AUC level, it is however important to also track the implementation of major PSC decisions which may not be necessarily captured by the CRF reports.

In order to ensure the systematic documentation and follow up mechanism, as per the previous PSC decision, which tasked the AUC to prepare an evaluation report on the status of implementation of PSC previous decisions on women in armed conflicts and to present it back to the Council has to take place. This will also be useful to follow closely commitments by member states. From the various decisions and recommendations the following may also need to be taken forward:

Convening of High level Forums: In its 757th session the Council has 'recommended the convening of an extraordinary AU Summit dedicated to the plight of women and children in armed conflicts, in order to give it the highest level of political attention that it deserves'. This decision, taken in 2018 demonstrated the Council's understanding of the severity of the protection gap and its commitment in addressing the specific needs of women and children in fragile contexts. However this extraordinary Summit is yet to take place. Translating such decision into action requires continuous advocacy and mobilizing support from the wider members of the AU.

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[32] *Progress and Challenges in Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture, Cheryl Hendricks, 2017* https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ad/article/view/167096

Similarly at its 862nd session the PSC agreed to dedicate an annual open session to conflict-related sexual violence. The purpose is to establish a forum that serves to take stock of progress made and challenges in ending sexual violence in armed conflicts in Africa. Although this is yet to materialize, this forum would have addressed a major gap in the WPS agenda in the PSC, given that from the 18 sessions that were convened over the past 10 years there were only two dedicated open session on this specific issue.

Follow up on the implementation of policies: the PSC has to follow closely and be briefed on how the policies adopted including the AU Gender Training Manual for AU PSOs, the Policy on Conduct and Discipline for PSOs and the Policy for Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for PSOs are being utilized. While the adoption of such frameworks is a necessary step for the protection of women, the implementation of such standards and the impact they have on the actual safety and security of women needs continuous follow up and monitoring.

Ratification and Domestication: The common recommendations directed to member states is towards the ratification, implementation and reporting on instruments including the Maputo Protocol and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as well as the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). The ratification and operationalization of such normative frameworks will indeed complement the efforts of advancing the WPS agenda.

Beyond, urging for member states to ratify and domesticate, it is also important to strengthen the reporting and accountability mechanism of the various policies. For instance, to date the Kampala Convention despite being the only global legal instrument, dedicated to the rights of IDPs it's only ratified by 29 countries.

Gender mainstreaming: there are a number of calls for gender mainstreaming in PSC sessions (364th, 833rd). One way of conducting this is by ensuring that country/regional or thematic reports submitted to the PSC apply a gender analysis lens and present in a dedicated section analysis of impact of the situation on women and girls. The Council considers standing country/region or thematic reports, however the gender aspect is still lacking in reports prepared by the AUC and AU offices. The PSC can request for the treatment in a systematic manner of the issue WPS in the reporting process along with a dedicated section on impact of conflicts under consideration on women and girls.

Opportunities going forward: in the year 2020 beyond commemorative events there are a number of policies, programs and reports that will also require review and follow up by the AUC and regular monitoring and policy guidance of the PSC. The first one is the reporting through the CRF to be presented in October. In line with PSC 772nd and 887th decisions the Special Envoy is expected to submit the second report on WPS using the criteria set in the framework with a focus on ensuring ownership and follow up within the AU system. Second the GPSP launched in 2014 in the AU Commission PSD for the period between 2015-2020 will need to be reviewed to assess its contribution in mainstreaming gender in the peace and security work of the AU and how it can be taken forward.

Third, the review of APSA roadmap (2016-2020) and the launch of a new roadmap is also a process that can benefit and enhance the gender mainstreaming process. Fourth, similarly the Silencing the Guns Master Roadmap lapses by the end of 2020 and there is an opportunity for plugging the WPS agenda into the Silencing the Guns process which is expected to continue beyond 2020. Fifth, FemWise has set a number of action points to be met by 2020 towards operationalizing its mandate. In February 2020 the Assembly has welcomed the training and deployment of mediators. However, in line with the set timeline of the PSC may need to be briefed on the work of the network, the progress it has made so far and the steps towards the next strategic period.

It is clear that all of these interlinked frameworks offer opportunities for the WPS agenda to be captured more prominently in the APSA components. The PSC as the central organ of the APSA has the mandate of oversight and the Special Envoy is best placed to play the coordination and follow up role to facilitate such integration of the WPS agenda across these various processes.

THE YEAR 2020 AND EMERGING THREATS

In 2019, at its 887th session the PSC reiterated that the year 2020 will serve as an opportunity to take stock of commitments made in the implementation of resolution 1325 as well as to examine achievements and challenges.

Additional AU Mechanisms Supporting the WPS Agenda

In addition to the principal mandate holder of the WPS agenda, the Office of the Special Envoy, there are also various departments and mechanisms that contribute to the objectives of the agenda.

One of the key mechanisms established towards increasing the active role of women in peace processes is FemWise-Africa (Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation). FemWise was established following the 665th PSC session on 13 March 2017, which endorsed the modalities of the Network and Assembly's decision in July 2017. FemWise functions a subsidiary body with APSA's Panel of the Wise. This is expected to be an important tool to promote the participation of women in preventive diplomacy, mediation, and peacekeeping initiatives of the AU.

FemWise has set deliverables by 2020 including its institutionalization and full operationalization to undertake training of 100 mediators annually, establish of centre of excellence and the adoption of national legislations to operationalize FemWise at national level. The network also envisions its operationalization through quarterly briefings to the PSC and the adoption of the AU policy on the role of women in prevention and mediation processes. Although many of these action points are yet to be fully operationalized, the February 2020 Summit has commended the efforts around deployment and training. However beyond this there is also need for the PSC to follow closely the progress of the actions identified by FemWise, the challenges hindering the operationalization of the network and its strategy past 2020 in advancing the WPS agenda.

The Special Rapporteur on Rights of Women of the ACHPR is a principal mandate holder for the promotion and protection of women's right through fact-finding missions, studies and monitoring the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and the Maputo Protocol.

The WGDD has the broad mandate of promoting and leading on AU's work on gender quality and women's empowerment. The Directorate undertakes its mandate guided by the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018-2028) and monitors the implementation of the SDGEA by receiving reports from member states.

The year indeed offered a number of symbolic landmark opportunities including the final year of the women decade (2010-2020), 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, 10-year anniversary of PSC's decision to dedicate annual session on WPS, the AU annual theme on Silencing the Guns which was declared a decade after the year of Peace and Security in Africa. However, the year 2020 in Africa and the world were confronted with a stern and unexpected global pandemic, COVID-19.

The standing PSC session on WPS planned for 31 March 2020 was also suspended as part of the measures to contain the spread of the virus, consequently all physical non-essential meetings of the AU were cancelled. For the first time since 2010 the PSC decided to hold the standing WPS session in March 2020 at a ministerial level. The meeting was scheduled to be convened in line with the theme 'The Role of Youth and Women in Silencing the Guns in Africa', under Equatorial Guinea's Chairpersonship in Malabo. Moreover, it was expected to be preceded by a technical level meeting. On 11 March, the PSC decided to suspend all its meetings until the end of April in line with the recommendations of Africa CDC, which advised for meetings to be held virtually if possible.

The spread of COVID19 had unprecedented effects on the ways in which the PSC conducted its meetings. To respond to these extraordinary circumstances the PSC has later on adopted an interim working arrangement to ensure continuity in its deliberations and decision- making mandate. The PSC meetings were taking place virtually and through email communication. [33]

In addition to the effects on the policy processes and working methods of the PSC, the pandemic has direct impact on the protection of women. COVID19 has also exposed the entrenched disparities including gender inequalities. With the increased spread of the virus and due to the lockdown measures taken by governments there has been a spike in increased reports of violence against women [34]. This is even more complex in conflict settings where protection mechanisms and institutions are already weak; the pandemic further exacerbates the marginalization of women. [35]

As observed in the concept note prepared by the Office of Special Envoy for the 19 March 2019 PSC open session, Africa hosts one third of forcibly displaced persons including 6.1 million refugees and asylum seekers, 16.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 711.218 stateless persons. Women and girls make up around 50% of any refugee, internally displaced or stateless population. In some cases, the percentage may be even higher. This is a testament on how women are disproportionately affected by conflicts and forced displacement. With the current pandemic of COVID19 the majority of vulnerable women living in dire humanitarian situation are particularly at risk. The dire condition in camps [36] due to congestion and inadequate hygiene and sanitation services makes them particularly vulnerable of being infected by the virus. This further adds to pre-existing vulnerabilities women face in such contexts.

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[33] *Amani Africa Special Report 6, New Peace and Security Council Working Methods During the COVID19 suspension of physical meetings http://www.amaniafricaet.org/images/Reports/AmaniAfricaSpecialResearchReport6.pdf*

[34] *https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-infocus/2020/05/08/putting-women-and-girls-safety-first-inafricas-response-to-covid-19/ 35 COVID19*

[35] *COVID19 A Double Burden for Women in Conflict https://medium.com/@UNPeacekeeping/covid-19-a-doubleburden-for-women-in-conflict-settings-a42ab1c8304b*

[36] *Amani Insight on the Briefing on the situation of IDPs, refugees and returnees in the COVID19 crisis 28 April 2020 http://www.amaniafricaet.org/images/Reports/VTCBriefingonIDPsrefugeesandreturneesintheCOVID19crisis.pdforg/images/Reports/VTCBriefingonIDPsrefugeesandreturneesintheCOVID19crisis.pdf*

In this context it is important to recall the press statement of the 833rd PSC session on "The Role of Women in Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: The Contribution of Women Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees in Africa" adopted on 19 March 2019. In this session the PSC called for the urgent development of guidelines on mainstreaming the experiences of women and girls, particularly those in the refugee and IDP camps, in the AU policies, strategies, processes and initiatives relating to conflict prevention and resolution. The development of this guideline is critical to ensure that the most marginalized women become part of all the response processes that aim at addressing conditions affecting their survival and wellbeing.

The Special Envoy on WPS has particularly noted the dangers of the spread of the virus in conflict zones and stressed that 'Fighting the virus must not distract us from the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, nor must it allow impunity for violations of that policy' [37]. In terms of monitoring the effects of emerging health threats on the implementation of the WPS agenda, the CRF has integrated elements that speak to such challenges. In addition to the four standard pillars of WPS agenda, participation, prevention, protection and relief and recovery, the CRF recognizes an additional pillar on emerging security threats. This component aims at monitoring issues including climate change, terrorism and health threats. Expanding the scope of the agenda beyond the set 'traditional pillars' allows flexibility in capturing the progress on measures taken to respond to evolving and emerging situation such as the COVID19.

In the past countries such as Guinea and regionally ECOWAS, have contextualized sexual and gender- based violence in emerging public health emergencies such as Ebola in their WPS NAPs and RAPs. In this context as well countries are able to design policies, which address the interlinked challenges faced by women in a comprehensive manner. This is a practice that can also be replicated in monitoring the effects of COVID-19 in implementing and reporting on the provisions of WPS by national governments.

CONCLUSION

2020 is a landmark year to assess and reflect on the decade of the WPS agenda within the AU. As part of the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the UNSC resolution 1325 in October 2020, the PSC is expected to hold a dedicated session to this end. The session will offer an opportunity to reflect and review the 10 years evolution of the WPS as a standing agenda of the Council and the women decade 2010-2020. The analysis in this special research report offers the basis for taking stock of the genesis and evolution of the WPS agenda within the AU and for identifying areas on how to take the agenda forward in the coming years.

This report, the first of its kind in chronicling one of an important thematic agenda of the PSC, presented analysis of the rich legal and policy instruments of the AU expressing strong normative commitment to gender equality and the rights of women and girls. In almost all of these legal and policy instruments reference is made to gender equality and the rights women and girls in relation to peace and security.

[37] https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200416/women-peaceand-security-wps-face-covid-19

While reference is made to UNSC Resolution 1325 in a number of the instruments, the analysis established that the PSC agenda on WPS is in the main an expression of the normative commitment to gender equality and the rights of women and girls enunciated in the burgeoning AU instruments.

After the establishment of the WPS as a standing thematic agenda of the PSC in 2010, there have been notable developments in consolidating and institutionalizing the agenda. It is interesting to note that it was on the recommendation of the AU Assembly that the WPS became a standing thematic agenda of the PSC. As the foregoing analysis has established, the first stage in the evolution of the WPS agenda was separating the WPS theme from that of children affected by armed conflicts.

The next stage in the consolidation of the WPS agenda in the AU system involves the establishment of dedicated institutional infrastructure dedicated to the WPS. In this regard, 2014 constitutes a landmark year. It was in 2014 that the AU Commission Chairperson appointed the Special Envoy on WPS. The AU Commission PSD also launched the five-year (2015-2020) Program on Gender and Peace and Security in 2014.

The other notable development in the evolution of the WPS agenda relate to its regular follow up as a standing theme within the PSC. Of interest is the fact that the PSC addresses the theme of WPS in sessions dedicated to the theme at least twice a year.

Apart from the annual session on the theme that usually takes place in March, the PSC has established another session dedicated to the session for every October which corresponds the anniversary of the adoption of UNSC resolution 1325. It is interesting to note that the PSC in a number of outcome documents of its sessions on WPS envisaged more regular consideration of the theme, although it has not been acted on.

In the past decade the AU and member states, at national level, and some RECs have undertaken a number of measures in advancing the WPS.

The appointment of the Special Envoy supported the PSC to receive regular briefing and to institutionalize the WPS agenda as well as the finalization of the CRF. Indeed, the next important phase in the evolution of the WPS agenda in the AU system was the development and adoption of the CRF as a monitoring and reporting framework.

As shown in this research report, while reporting to the PSC on the WPS is envisaged in various outcome documents of PSC sessions on the theme as an important aspect of the institutionalization of WPS in the AU system, this has not been meaningfully implemented. The Special Envoy, who can play the lead role in this regard, was able to produce and present two reports on the implementation of the agenda in the continent including one utilizing the CRF.

The office of the Special Envoy also played a key bridging role between grass root women organizations and policy makers. The office of the Special Envoy has particularly worked towards supporting the development of UNSCR 1325 national action plans.

However, the impact of these tools in the actual protection and promotion of women's rights particularly in conflict or post-conflict context remains limited. Hence the implementation of existing commitments either policies or legal instruments has to be at the centre of the WPS agenda in the years ahead.

Over the past 10 years some of the deadliest conflicts erupted in Africa, which were characterized by deliberate and extreme violence committed against women. Despite being subjected to deliberate attacks and violence they also paid a hard price to be at the negotiation table.

In order to build on the success of the past decade and in moving towards the next one, it is essential to enhance the following working methods and focus area:

Monitoring, documenting and reporting

As noted in the analysis, the PSC has requested for submission of regular report on WPS. This is an important basis for anchoring monitoring, documenting and reporting as one pillar of the institutionalization and consolidation of this agenda in the AU system. This would entail that the monitoring, documenting and reporting on WPS forms an integral part of the work of AU liaison offices, mediation processes and peace support operations.

Indeed, this is one way through which the Special Envoy and the GPSP can assist in the mainstreaming of WPS across the peace and security work of the AU.

Addressing WPS issues in specific conflict situations and mainstreaming

In terms of targeted and context specific implementation of the WPS agenda, another area for concrete action is ensuring the mainstreaming and addressing of WPS issues in specific conflict situations. This can be done through the use of gender analysis when reporting on those specific conflict situations and when the PSC deliberates on specific conflict situations.

There is also a need for implementing the decision of the 833rd session of the PSC for purposes of mainstreaming. This would require acting on the call for the development of guidelines on mainstreaming the experiences of women and girls in the conflict prevention and resolution.

Impact and implementation

There is a need to ensure that policies and actions by decision makers genuinely translate in the actual protection and promotion of women's rights. Political will of governments and robust accountability mechanisms at the continental level may enable the agenda to serve the purpose it was mainly created for. This requires more systematic and targeted approach for tracking and ensuring implementation across the conflict prevention, management, resolution and post-conflict reconstruction and development cycle.

Coordination

The WPS agenda is indeed a comprehensive program that stretches over a number of mechanisms and departments at the AUC and RECs/RMs level, policy organs as well as national institutions. There is a need for a better coordination among the various gender focal points and policy mechanisms in the AU. The agenda will have more prominence and impact when there is a close working relation between the different mechanisms including the Office of the Special Envoy, GPSP, WGDD, FemWise and ACHPR's Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights towards a common goal.

On the other hand, while the global partnership on WPS the Special Envoy is contributing to is a useful endeavour, it should however be undertaken while focusing more on consolidating the agenda within the AU system itself. There is a greater value for the office of the Special Envoy to focus on strengthening the WPS agenda in the AU system. The global WPS agenda while linked to the regional process, has a lot of support. Certainly the institutionalization of the WPS agenda in the AU system can have lasting legacy.

Enhancing engagement of local women organizations

In this respect, there are two ways through which the PSC can take the WPS agenda to the next level. The first is to ensure that WPS is given a dedicated focus in PSC field visits to conflict settings. The other is to institutionalize invitation of community-based women organizations to PSC sessions on WPS and on specific conflict situations.

Identifying and addressing specific WPS themes of concern for women in Africa

In several sessions, the PSC focused on specific WPS themes. Building on this experience, there is a need for mapping specific WPS themes of concern for women in Africa. Such mapping is important to initiate targeted intervention and follow up on those specific themes at the level of both the PSC and the various WPS mechanisms in the AU.

Addressing emerging threats

The year 2020 is also a unique period as the world is fighting the spread of COVID19. This kind of extraordinary situation offers an opportunity to reflect on emerging security threats, which do not fall under the traditional conception of security, mainly related to armed conflicts. Thus, it compels policy makers to rethink preventive and preparedness measures for emerging threats such as climate change and pandemics. In this particular context it is essential to also address the compounded effects of health hazards and peace and security threats on women in particular. The PSC may utilize various existing tools including conflict prevention and early warning tools as well as technical expertise in the AUC including strengthened engagements with humanitarian affairs, health division and disaster risk reduction unit

KEY AU DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

- AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018-2028 *https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36195-doc-au_strategy_for_gender_equality_womens_empowerment_2018-2028_report.pdf*

- AU 2009 Gender Policy

- Continental Results Framework, Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of Women, Peace and Security in Africa (2018-2018), AUC, 2019 *https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/35958-doc-continental_results_framework_wps_.pdf*

- Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa, AUC, 2016 *https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/special-envoy-report-2016-final-2.pdf*

- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), 2003 *https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter_on_rights_of_women_in_africa.pdf*

- Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, 2004 *https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38956-doc-assembly_au_decl_12_iii_e.pdf*

- The African Women Decade 2010-2020 *https://au.int/en/documents-43*

- Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa, Report on Implementation, AUC, 2019

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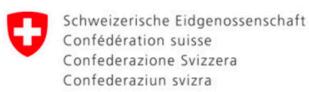
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